Subject: CCA Reflects: Maximizing the Impact of Transit Investment in DTLA - May 2018
From: Central City Association <toh@ccala.org>
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To: <Stephanie.Uy@lacity.org>

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CCA Reflects is a monthly series where we share our insights on what is happening in DTLA and the region.

Maximizing the Impact of Transit Investment in Downtown LA

One week after the Regional Connector hit a construction milestone at 50% complete, the Metro Board voted to advance another light rail line: the West Santa Ana Branch (WSAB). Downtown LA continues to strengthen its position as the rail hub for the entire region, and CCA is focused on ensuring that residents, businesses, and visitors all benefit from these transformative investments. The WSAB Line is the latest and one of the most important Metro projects planned for our community, and we want Downtown voices to be heard.

Planned to open as early as 2028, the WSAB will travel from Artesia, through the Gateway Cities, to DTLA. It will carry upwards of 80,000 riders per day, bringing new people and new opportunities to Downtown and finally connecting the Arts District and Industrial District — and potentially the Fashion District — to our regional rail network. It will also be an important mobility option for the additional 125,000 residents and 55,000 workers coming to Downtown over the next two decades.

CCA has several priorities for the WSAB including maximizing ridership, minimizing transfers and travel times, and serving both existing and future job and population centers. Metro proposed three different possible termini for the line and needed to decide which to carry forward into its environmental impact report (EIR). The options were Union Station (Alignments E and F), the Downtown Transit Core at Metro Center or Pershing Square (Alignment G), and Arts District-LA River at 6th Street (Alignment H).

Each option has its own strengths and weaknesses, forcing tradeoffs between important service priorities. Union Station is a valuable transfer point between many different rail lines, but it is not the final destination of most riders and can result in unnecessary transfers and extra travel time. The Downtown Transit Core provides a one-seat ride to more passengers, but fails to serve South Park or much of the Fashion District, and requires a transfer to connect to Union Station. An Arts District-LA River terminus would serve one of the fastest growing neighborhoods in the city and connect to a potential Red Line extension to 6th Street, but it would require transfers for most trips to DTLA.

Amidst the planning for the WSAB, Downtown stakeholders have also been exploring an east-west transit line that would connect the Arts District to South Park via the Industrial and Fashion Districts. The lack of a reliable east-west transit connection has been a long-time concern for CCA and our members. These neighborhoods are not only growing, but South Park is home to the Convention Center with millions of visitors that need accessibility to the rest of Downtown and the region. The WSAB discussion was an opportunity to raise the profile of these concerns and make it clear that the absence of an east-west connection affects the entire Metro rail network.

At Metro's Board meeting on May 24th, CCA advocated that the Board move forward with Alignments E, G, and H because these three termini represent different points along a potential east-west transit connection. Regardless of which alignment would be selected as the environmentally superior alternative, the data from studying these three routes would help demonstrate the strong transit demand all along an east-west corridor, from the Arts District to South Park. We also asked for Metro's support for early planning efforts on an east-west line, separate from environmental review of the WSAB.

The Metro Board of Directors ultimately decided to move forward with Alignments E and G, ending at Union Station and the Downtown Transit Core respectively, and chose not to study Alignment H. Fortunately, Councilmember Huizar's office advanced a motion to begin planning for an extension of the Red Line to a 6th Street Arts District Station, and that work may be leveraged — alongside the WSAB EIR and Metro's Division 20 turnback facility and railyard expansion — to grow support for an east-west transit line through Downtown.

As these projects move ahead, CCA will continue to emphasize the central role that Downtown plays in the regional transportation network and our ongoing need for improved mobility options, especially as we prepare to welcome visitors from all over the world at the 2028 Olympics. Those needs will only increase as people and jobs move to neighborhoods like the Fashion District, Arts District, and Industrial District, and now is the time to plan for that growth — not after it's already arrived. We appreciate the involvement of our members and the leadership of the Business Improvement Districts in these efforts, and we're excited for the benefits that this work will bring to Downtown's residents, businesses, and visitors.

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Central City Association of Los Angeles

Enhancing DTLA's vibrancy and increasing investment in the region

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